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ABSTRACT

The author argues that reading instruction could be dramatically improved by making it an integral part of the total curriculum, rather than a subject taught in isolation from the content areas. After reviewing data on reading failure and illiteracy, particular causes of poor reading instruction are discussed. Adequate instruction will come only when reading becomes a responsibility of all teachers, with each guiding the reading/thinking process as it affects their own subject areas. Examples are given of the reading/thinking skills required in specific subject areas. (AA)

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# READING INSTRUCTION IN THE ENTIRE CURRICULUM

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Rose Kassab-Golden

# INTRODUCTION

The public schools have long embodied the hopes of the American people. While there had been some adverse criticism of public education in the past, basically, the American people have had faith in its public schools. Much educational progress has been made: curricula have changed drastically to move in concert with societal changes, teachers are better trained in their content area than ever before, classes are smaller, buildings are better equipped, and more specialists have been added to staffs.

However, while these changes are highly commendable, there is much dissatisfaction in many quarters with the educational product. Teachers are becoming increasingly frustrated by the inability of their students to cope with reading assignments; parents are extremely concerned by their children's reading handicaps; pupils lament the fact that they cannot read as well or as fast as they would like; college professors decry the lack of thinking ability of their students; students are "turned off" to learning. Far too many students cannot, after years of "education", read critically; many more do <u>not</u> read except superficially; still more <u>hate</u> reading! A sad commentary on our educational system in a country which can put men on the moon!

To date, reading instruction has <u>not</u> been adequate. Reading instruction is defined as the instruction of reading skills which permits the learner to recognize the printed word, interpret the printed word, and react to the printed word.

This writer believes sincerely that reading ability should and would be improved dramatically in most people <u>provided</u> reading

instruction becomes an integral part of the entire school curriculum. As long as reading continues to be presented as a subject (in isolation from the content areas) rather than as a thinking process, students will continue to feel inadequate because of inferior reading ability.

## NEED FOR A CHANGE

While our affluent society may want to ignore the issue, more and more evidence today points to the inadequacy of today's reading instruction. "Masses of American students are coming out of the public schools unable to function effectively because of reading deficiencies."[1]

Statistics from the United States Office of Education indicate: one in four students has significant reading deficiencies; more than three million illiterates are unemployed; one-half of the unemployed youth, ages 16-24, are functionally illiterate; three-quarters of the juvenile offenders in New York City are two or more years retarded in reading.[2] What a burden for society whose first responsibility is to its citizens! What a waste of humanity! Pearl S. Buck knew of what she spoke when she aptly summarized the effects of one's inability to read: "....sad to reflect how many minds, potentially great, have been lost in the vast unlearned population of

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1. National School Public Relations Assoc., Reading Crisis: The Problem and Suggested Solutions, Washington, D.C., 1970.

2. Ibid. p. 2

of the world, lost because they had no opportunity to learn how to read."[3]

One may argue that society has always had, and will continue to have, the low ability child who, incidentally, is usually placed in a low ability group and "classified", with little effort made to determine just what his learning problems are! He is then given a "general" education, including plenty of films, "work-with-his hands" shop courses (home economics for the girls--maybe even typing!), and general math; plenty of easy-to-read, comic book-type material in English class....this continues until he either "drops out" of school or is graduated. Thus it is considered that he has been "educated"!! How tragic to send out into the world, after twelve or more years of schooling, someone who cannot (or does not) read newspapers and magazines which may help him to make a good choice on election days; or one who cannot read and understand a contract he must sign, or read his own insurance policies, or understand myriads of problems now facing society: pollution, wars, racism, drug addiction, alcoholism.

Again, a waste of human resources! In most cases, these "low ability" students are basically intelligent people who have not, for many reasons, received proper reading instruction. Yet, they are tested and categorized largely on the basis of the results of reading achievement tests. Even the group intelligence tests

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3. Buck, Pearl S., Address: "Delights of Learning", University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Penna., April 6, 1960.

administered in most schools are reading-tests! If a child has reading difficulties, naturally he would score low in an intelligence test which requires reading! Astronaut Gibson admits to failing in grades one and four. Subsequently, his astronomical space feats attested to his academic and personal strength; yet how many of us would have considered a first and fourth grade "failure" a future success?

Not only are "low ability" students affected by reading failure or inadequacy--our ABLE students, too, now reflect the need for an all-school reading program. Consider:

In his study of "superior" students, Osenburg concluded that those who score high on standardized reading achievement tests and who are accepted at college are not necessarily mature readers. He contends that that his subjects were superior only in their ability to recognize a correct answer in an objective test and that the higher level reading skills were not necessarily developed.[4]

Hafter and Douglas, after eight years of studying students who fail in college because of reading disability concluded that their problems lie chiefly in the thinking skills in most reading activities, not in the basic skills of word recognition and literal comprehension.[5]

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4. Osenburg, F., "Concerning Objective Reading Tests: A Minority Opinion", Journal of Developmental Reading, Vol. 5 1962, pp. 275-7

5. Hafter, Irma and Douglas, "Inadequate College Reader", Journal of Developmental Reading, 1958, pp. 42-53

As long ago as 1959, William G. Perry reported on a study made at Harvard: fifteen hundred Harvard and Radcliffe freshmen were assigned a chapter to read in a history book with no specific instruction except that they were to be tested afterward. On the multiple-choice test Perry says the results were "excellent", but when asked to state the main point of the chapter, ".... out of fifteen hundred of the finest readers in the country, only one percent out of fifteen hundred pupils was able to tell us what the chapter was about."[6]

Recently the Board of Education of the affluent community of Highland Park, N. J., polled the town to determine what its citizens felt were the chief educational needs of the community. Of the ninety-seven needs cited, reading headed the list!

Formerly, the blame for reading failure had always been placed on the student or his home environment. According to the United States Office of Education's PREP (Putting Research Into Practice) in an in-depth study of the current reading failures, the blame has shifted. Now parents are saying there is something wrong with the educational system.

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

There are many causes of reading deficiencies: excessive absences, frequent moving, physical handicaps (hearing, vision, and speech), mental retardation, inadequate teachertraining, and insufficient instruction.

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6. Perry, William G., "Students: Use and Misuse of Reading Skills: A Report to the Faculty", Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 29, No. 3, Summer, 1959, pp. 193-200

This writer believes sincerely that most people do not read as well as they could or should primarily because of the way reading is taught(rather than handled) in our school system. Reading is looked upon as a subject to be presented during a specific time slot, and during this time period the instruction usually takes the form of rote drill of basic sounds via a notebook, workbook or a ditto sheet (often with the print so faint, it is barely readable) and/or children taking turns reading aloud a story at which time mispronunciations are corrected by the teacher AND other pupils. Then the reading books are put away, and the class moves to another "Subject" in which the content is "covered" with little or no correlation to reading.

Reading is not just a subject! It is a process--a thinking process--people read about literature, about science, art, medicine. People read for many different purposed and therefore must learn HOW to read DIFFERENT types of materials for DIFFERENT REASONS. Once reading instruction becomes more than an isolated one-period-a-day activity, once reading skills instruction is integrated with the content to be read, then students can develop more confidence as they experience success in comprehending the material for which they are held responsible.

Time has been a factor contributing to reading deficiencies. With the advent of the knowledge "explosion", the impact has been felt by the classroom teacher as more and more information is incorporated into the curriculum. Content teachers have so much to "cover" (THEY feel), that they are forced to teach much more superficially than they know they should," says Harold Herber, who then offers

another reason for pupils' inability to cope with reading assignments: Students are given assignments but not taught HOW to do the assignment, partly as a result of "assumptive teaching" in which, explains Herber, teachers ASSUME the students have learned the reading skills necessary for reading the texts.[7]

Another cause of poor reading instruction is that so few people (including those who make curricular decisions) are aware of the extent of the reading problem, and so few of these same people truly understand the reading process as we understand it today. Many believe that if a student does not read well, he has "low ability". The student himself feels "stupid" and "drops out" of education mentally until he reaches the age at which he can "drop out" physically. On the contrary, many of these children are very intelligent, but they have reading problems, most of which are correctable. Most people assume that if one can pronounce words well, he is a good reader; if he can memorize well and regurgitate details on a test, he is considered a "good" student. Then, too, many educators sincerely believe that reading should only be taught in the elementary school and only in the language arts class. NEITHER is sufficient to provide each human with the reading skills so necessary for a successful, emotionally-sound adult life. To learn a foreign language (mastery of), 1700 study hours are really essential. How can we learn to read English in a 30 minute period one hundred and eighty days a year (total 90 hours) for three years"?!

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7. Herber, Harold, Teaching Reaning in the Content Areas, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Ha;;. 1970, Chapter 1.

Much of the problem of poor reading has been caused by the fact that few elementary teachers have had more than one course in reading, and that was usually coupled with a course in language arts. While colleges may require prospective elementary teachers to take six semester hours of physical education, mathematics, art and music, most of them require only three semester hours of reading! Conant found that out of thirty-five colleges, only nineteen required a specific course in the teaching of reading. He calls this "inadequate for K-3 teachers and barely adequate for teachers of grades 4-6."[8] He suggests a minimum of three semester hours for all elementary school teachers and twice that for K-3 teachers. Conant is an example of one (whom many follow blindly!) who does not truly understand the reading process or he would NOT recommend LESS semester hours in reading for teachers of grades 4-6, which is a most crucial stage in the reading process, that point in the educational scheme where the cognitive reading skills should be emphasized! How many really know how to teach these vital reading skills? Neither would Conant suggest six semester hours of teacher training in art and music and only three semester hours of reading--not if he truly understood the many facets of understanding the reading process: recognizing reading disabilities, diagnosing disabilities, understanding the basic reading skills, learning techniques for developing those skills; these are but a few of the many aspects of reading that should be a part of every elementary school teacher's education!

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8. Conant, James B., The Education of American Teachers, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963, pp. 156-159.

Silberman, too, illustrates how little he understands some of the learning problems resulting from the inability to read well; he limits the subject of reading in his text to the elementary grades while, at the same time, he admits that "without the ability to read, no child is likely to feel good about himself."[9] Reading instruction is essention through all grades!

## TEACHER-PUPIL ROLES

Reading is certainly not the only learning tool, but approximately seventy-five per cent of the learning which takes place in school comes from books.[10] A student trained to read many types of materials can become a more active participant in the educational program. But how few can do this independently! Most are trained to read to memorize, thereby having little or no understanding of concepts. Or, if a book (which the publisher says is on a certain grade level) is too difficult for individuals to handle, the teacher will tell the class what the book says, read it to the class, have the students take turns reading verbatim aloud (What public humiliation for the disabled reader!!) to make "sure" the class gets it, or have the students try on their own to struggle through the text. These, then, have been the alternatives, and, as a result, students do little reading and are uninvolved in the learning process.

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9. Silberman, Charles E., Crisis in the Classroom, N. Y.: Random House, 1970.

10. Fay, Leo C., Reading in the High School, Assoc. of Classroom Teachers of the N. E. A., 1956, p. 10.

Pupils and teachers oftentimes have reversed roles: the teacher is active, reading to the students, explaining what the author has said, what he meant, what the experiment proves, what conclusions can be drawn, what should vigorously be studied for Friday's test . . .ad infinitum. The student, in turn, is passive, accepting what he hears as "gospel". How much more effective if the student is taught how to read the material himself so that he may learn, question, and apply what he has learned!

READING INSTRUCTION FOR ALL

Most educators agree that reading instruction is essential, but some feel that unless the student is college-bound, his reading needs are minimal. Even Broudy argued that the common American man does not need an intensive study of hard subjects,"....nor is it desirable...most want a job and family and rarely need the skills beyond the junior high level",[11] says Broudy. This may have been the case in 1960, but Broudy's opinion is viewed by this writer as intellectual snobbery in today's world where the common man and woman are inundated by the horrors of Watergate, a secret Cambodian war, crime in the streets, inflation, an energy crisis ..... a public awakening to its own gullibility and passivity. The common person also needs to read for pleasure---as a relief from a most strenuous day. Bruner could well answer Broudy with this statement: "If all students are helped to the full utilization of their

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11. Broudy, Harry S., Paradox and Promise, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1961, p. 11.

intellectual powers, we will have a better chance of surviving as a democracy in an age of enormous technological and social complexity."[12]

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY TO TEACH READING SKILLS?

Many schools believe they have solved the reading problem by adding a reading specialist to the staff. This is not the answer for several reasons: one, a specialist works only with small groups in order to diagnose properly and perscribe remediation while hundreds more in the same school are overlooked; secondly, recent studies are indicating that remediation of reading problems in the reading laboratory has little lasting effect! Reading skills instruction is rarely transferred if presented in an envrionment in isolation from the subject in which those reading skills are usable. Then, too, the child works on his level with the specialist but returns to the same frustration he/she originally had with the textbooks.

Often the stumbling block has been the teachers themselves who, although they decry their students' lack of reading ability, feel unprepared to teach reading skills in their tight schedules. Their concern is justifiable; the reading program has for too long been in the hands of teachers who were inadequately trained in reading. The task of teaching reading is an all-school responsibility, and good in-service training can do much to dispel fears of inadequacy on the part of teachers. Tanner, the only curriculum author this writer found to devote time to reading in the secondary schools, reports the major findings

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12. Bruner, Jerome S., The Process of Education, N. Y.:Random House, 1960, p. 10.

of a survey conducted to determine the status of reading instruction in the public high schools: ...."more than 80 percent of the respondents had never had a course on the teaching of reading .....and more than 80 per cent of all the teachers reported that the English departments in their schools do not give the teaching of reading sudficient attention for reading to be considered a major departmental ocncern."[13] This study reflects the belief of most educators--that reading instruction is the province of the English department, when, in fact, even the English teachers cannot or do not adequately teach reading.

The reluctance of teachers to comprehend the compatibility of reading and subject matter is understandable. They are specialists in their content area and would need a reading consultant's assistance in understanding the reading process so that they may be better able to guide their students in developing their reading ability.

## HOW CAN READING BE FUSED WITH CONTENT?

As more research becomes avaialble on teaching reading in the content areas, some teachers have come to realize that the teaching of reading skills merely, basically, means guiding the reading/thinking process in the printed materials of their discipline, and that, in turn, indicates they are teaching the skills required to learn the reading material in their discipline.[14]

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13. Tanner, Daniel, Secondary Curriculum: Theory and Development, N. Y.: Macmillan, 1971, pp. 259-260.

14. Bader, Lois, "Preparing Future Secondary Teachers in Reading", Journal of Reading, International Reading Assoc., Newark, Del., Ap. '72.

This is true in the English classroom where students meet with great ideas. Can the student follow sequence? Can he read to sense evidence of emotion in a character? Can he interpret figures f of speech? Can he draw logical conclusions? Can he use various methods of the analyzis of unfamiliar words and phrases? If the answer to any of these is "no", then instruction in strengthening one or more reading skills is in order in that class. If the answer to these questions is "yes:, then we can assume the student reads literature well. The assumption, then, is that he can do well in physics, or geometry, or a foreign language. The assumption may be fallacious. The fact that one can read literature is no guarantee he can read and reason in another area unless he is equipped with additional reading skills.

Science is one area in which specialized reading skills are necessary; yet many students read the science text as they would a novel, searching in vain for symbolism, etc. The science vocabulary is most complex; students should learn to apply structural analysis techniques for learning the vocabulary. Distinguishing main ideas and details is crucial for comprehension. Generalizing is still a skill which requires further developing in this area. The organization of scientific material is quite different form literature; familiarization with the organization of data is essential for science students.

Recently, this writer was invited into a Physics I class by the teacher to determine why so many "topnotch" students could not understand the text. The class was instructed to read to

themselves a certain passage, and they were to read it in their usual way. When they had finished the short selection, it was found that there was little comprehension By asking the students to recall anything they remembered from the assignment, it was determined why they did not comprehend:

1. They were reading to memorize (as determined by their ability to quote verbatim the details on those pages). They were reading words, not ideas.
2. They had read over the pronoun it with no conscious thought as to what the word it referred, and its reference was vital to understanding the concept presented.

In this one instance alone, twenty-seven intelligent students were sadly in need of a simple lesson on how to read a physics book.

The mathematics class is another area where some reading instruction is essential; otherwise, the students are reading their verbal problems either as they would a romantic novel or as they would memorize a history lesson for a test. Either way, he fails algebra and is destined to be relegated to a general math class.

There is a technique to reading verbal problems which is simple, yet seldom taught. The math teacher is math-oriented, and to him, the question is so simple; little is he aware of HOW his students read read the problem which, to them, is certainly not simple. Nila Banton Smith suggests a simple procedure: verbal problems are read several times--once simply to identify the problem. (How often pupils attempt to solve the problem before he has as yet identified the problem!!) The rate of reading here is slow and

deliberate--this is not the place for speed reading! Every word means something. The problem must then be re-read to determine what facts are given with which to solve the problem. One must then decide what processes to use and by estimating an answer, one can begin working to solve the problem. All of this involves reading and thinking simultaneously.

Shorthand has usually been a course reserved for the BEST business students because the course is "difficult"; yet, if one is to examine the WHY of the difficulty, he will discover that it is difficult primarily because the technique is based on sounds, and if a student is deficient in the auditory discrimination of language sounds in English, he/she will be unable to translate them into shorthand symbols. However, if she receives instruction in the basic sounds, the student can readily become a confident, adept stenographer at the same time she is becoming a better reader.

In the shop courses it is not enough for the students to be able to make a project. They should learn to read theory, read and follow directions, learn the terminology pertinent to the work--all are reading skills. The problem of requiring automobile mechanics to pass a test for state certification is meeting with opposition in some circles because some otherwise good mechanics cannot read well enough to pass the test! How much more confidence and personal pride a mechanic would have if he had been taught how to read those manuals at the same time he was learning to repair an engine!

In health education students learn the number of bones in the body; they memorize the names of most of them, draw the respiratory system, and countless other inane assignments while billions of printed words go unread on the health problems of which so many are suffering: venereal disease flourishes as does alcoholism and drug addiction--malnutrition exists not only in the coal fields of West Virginia, but in the teenage diets for millions of Americans who should be better-read on the subject of health and nutrition. By developing reading skills of cause and effects and distinguishing fact from fantasy in health classes at the same time one was studying health issues, a healthier, happier, emotionally stable family may result.

Social studies classrooms provide an opportunity whereby a student may develop his social role and become concerned with learning to become a responsible citizen participating in the building of a better world. But overemphasis on rote learning and facts isolated from the daily historical events surrounding us hinders development in this area. Use of one textbook geared to the "middle" or "top" of the class will compound the problem. How much more democratic, more educationally ~~,ioj ,pre de,peratoc; ,pre edicatopma;,~~ sound, more practical is it for the teacher to be so reading-oriented that she is aware of the reading abilities of her students so that she:

1. supplies many different types of reading material of various reading difficulty so that ALL may read something!

2. provides differentiated assignments involving different reading skills so that ALL may be actively involved!

3. may make known to the students the structure of the assignment and provide them with the direction they need to read and investigate further!

Is not one of the chief purposes of education to develop independent learners so that they can continue to learn even after they pass throught the school? How then can we explain why so many eighteen-year olds, newly franchised, neglected to vote? Why does America, a land of plenty, have such a low percentage voting each election day, and why is she bled by corruption in government at all levels in this day when so much is written to inform the public? If the public learned to read critically society's history and its issues, would such historical indignities ~~persist~~ persist--or would an enlightened public be a handicap to such deceptions?

Bruner urges that "reading be rescued from its passivity and turned into a more active enterprise."[15] This is possible in all subject areas, not just the few mentioned here, but this requires tremendous change in teaching procedures and teacher training. It CAN be done! A good teacher could learn to analyze the reading needs of his students, decide where in the sequence of his overall teaching plan that they will need instruction and, with the help of a competent reading consultant, plan accordingly. But in order to teach his students how to acquire the ideas from

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15. Bruner, Jerome, Towards a Theory of Instruction, Cambridge:Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 105.

printed material, he must himself be aware of the skills necessary to read the material. He need not teach all of the reading skills--just those necessary to read to understand or explore a particular idea. Herber contends that "skills are developed functionally, not directly."[16] Perhaps if more teachers understood this, they would be less hesitant to try to incorporate reading strategies with their subject.

## CONCLUSION

Reading instruction within the content areas is not viewed as a panacea for correcting all reading problems, but its effectiveness in several schools should indicate that it can do much to make education truly more meaningful. The Norfolk* City School System, led by reading expert, Harold Herber, has instituted such a program and recently opened its schools to educators nationwide to view their dramatic move to attack the reading problem. Many school districts are conducting reading workshops for their teachers in all content areas. Since reading is one of education's most challenging problems, a move in this direction by others is certainly worth a try.

* Norfolk, Virginia

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16. Herber, Harold, op cit., p. 10.

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